Poletown Historic District
Detroit Steel Products Company Plant
7610 Joseph Campau Ave.
Detroit
Wayne
MI

HABS No. MI-275-1

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON DC, 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL ARCHITECTURAL AND ENGINEERING RECORD
POLETOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

Detroit Steel Products Company Plant HABS No. MI-275-1

(Also known as Mid-West Paper Products Company)

Location:	7610 Joseph Campau Avenue @ 2250 East Grand Boulevard Detroit, Michigan UTM: 17.331650.4693980 Quad: Highland Park
Date of Construction:	1907-1937
Present Owner:	City of Detroit, Department of Community & Economic Development 150 Michigan Avenue Detroit, Michigan 48226
Present Use:	None
Significance:	It was the main manufacturing plant of the Detroit Steel Products Company from 1907 to 1960. This firm was an important manufacturer of automobile springs and steel window frames. It was a major employer in the Milwaukee Junction industrial district.
Historian:	Charles K. Hyde, April 1981

John G. Rumney organized the Detroit Steel Products Company on September 3, 1904, with the modest capital stock of $50,000. The company started manufacturing railroad and automobile springs with twenty employees in a small plant at 91-99 East Fort in Detroit. It was the first American company to produce uniform, high-quality springs from alloy steel. The demand for the product, "Detroit Springs," increased so rapidly that the company was forced to seek larger quarters and bought a parcel on East Grand Boulevard in Detroit's Milwaukee Junction industrial district. Detroit Steel Products began to move into its new plant in 1907 and by the end of the following year, it had transferred all operations to the new site.[1] By 1910, the company identified itself as, "Manufacturers of Motor Car Springs, Heavy Draft Gear Springs, Drop Forgings, and Detroit Fenestra Solid Steel Window Sash."[2] Much of the subsequent expansion at the Grand Boulevard site was the result of the successful manufacture of "Fenestra" windows beginning in 1907. Detroit Steel Products was one of the earliest, if not the first American firm to manufacture steel windows.[3]

Production of springs and windows soared in the 1910s and the company added more than a dozen new buildings to the sprawling complex. The Detroit architectural firm of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls executed forty distinct jobs at the site between 1908 and 1924.[5] Detroit Steel Products employed 1,211 in 1920 and about 1,500 by 1924.[6] Detroit Springs were standard equipment in more than sixty car models by the mid-1920s, and Fenestra Windows were sold worldwide.[7] Even though the company added a window plant in Oakland, California, in 1923, the East Grand Boulevard site became increasingly overcrowded. In 1929, the company built a new plant on a 35-acre site at Mound Road and Caniff, north of the existing plant, and moved all the spring manufacturing operations there, so the older plant could work exclusively on windows. In addition, the firm began making garage and hanger doors at the

East Grand Boulevard plant.[8] The last major construction at the window plant took place in 1936-1937, when the company added two more buildings to the complex, for a total of thirty, producing a combined floorspace of slightly over 600,000 square feet.[9] The company remained here after the Second World War, but it changed its name to "Fenestra, Inc." in the late 1950s. Mid-West Paper Products Company occupied the complex from the early 1960s until the plant was razed in 1981.

For the first few years, the plant consisted of four rectangular steel-framed buildings running north and south, parallel to each other, plus a steel-framed powerhouse. Proceeding from east to west, there was a (window) sash building, a forge (1907), a smaller building possibly used for steel storage, and a spring shop (1908). All had gabled roofs and the forge building had a clerestory roof monitor to aid in lighting and ventilation.[10] The sash building, approximately 70 feet by 400 feet, and the powerhouse, located behind the storage building, were not extant in 1981.

Beginning in 1910, the plant expanded outward from the core of original buildings, with spring production at the western end of the complex and window production at the eastern end. The company made five additions to the spring shop between 1910 and 1915, including one large rectangular building, 70 feet by 396 feet, running parallel to the 1908 structure. The two were linked by several single-story steel-framed additions with roofs featuring sawtooth monitors, cement tile on the outside, and cement plaster interiors.[11] The result was a workspace about 350 feet by 400 feet, broken by several walls and numerous steel columns. This part of the plant survived largely intact until 1981. The company also built several large single-story steel buildings with sawtooth roofs east of the original sash building, mainly to house the growing steel window production. These included one building 216 feet wide and 247 feet long, completed in 1910, flanked on the east by a similar structure,

120 feet by 146 feet (1923), and on the west by a building measuring 126 feet by 199 feet and completed in 1924. They all had cement tile roofs and cement plaster interiors.[12] Except for a small segment of the easternmost building, all of these structures were removed to create parking spaces.

Two buildings at the southern edge of the complex, both on Griffin, are noticeably different from the rest. One is a three-story reinforced concrete office building (1917), measuring 48 feet by 103 feet. The second is a rectangular steel-framed building with a facade entirely covered with glass, measuring 40 feet wide and 234 feet long, completed in 1937 at a cost of $85,000. It held a new bonderizing (rustproofing) plant, built to handle the entire output of steel windows.[13] Both buildings survived until 1981.

The Detroit Steel Products Company was one of dozens of Detroit manufacturing firms that successfully specialized in products related to the automobile industry and grew rapidly when the Detroit car companies prospered in the 1910s and 1920s. The firm began on a small scale in an established central city location, moved to what appeared to be an enormous new plant site, but found that it too was inadequate for its needs, so the company bought another plant site even further removed from the central city. By the mid-1920s, Detroit Steel Products had covered most of its Grand Boulevard plant site with buildings, creating a congested environment which was tolerable as long as employees walked to work or took public transportation. The popularity of the automobile in the postwar years forced this firm and most others in the Milwaukee Junction district to demolish buildings to create parking spaces for its employees.

NOTES

[1]Michigan Manufacturer and Financial Record, XXXIII (May 10, 1924), p. 186 and Polk's Detroit City Directory, 1905-1908, passim.

[2]Polk's Detroit City Directory, 1910.

[3]The Detroiter, XX (June 24, 1929), p. 9.

[4]Michigan Manufacturer and Financial Record, VI (January 14, 1910), p. 52.

[5]Job cards in the offices of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls Associates, Inc., Detroit.

[6]Clarence M. Burton, The City of Detroit, Michigan, 1701-1922, I (Detroit, 1922), p. 602 and Michigan Manufacturer and Financial Record, XXXIII (May 10, 1924), p. 186.

[7]Ibid.

[8]"Detroit Steel Products Company Begins Expansion Program," The Detroiter, XX (June 24, 1929), p. 9.

[9]Detroit Free Press, August 2, 1936; November 15, 1936; and October 10, 1937.

[10]Undated photograph (ca. 1910) in the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, shows a "Forge Dept." sign on one building.

[11]Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, Job Number 2068 (7-12-1911), 2305 (8-30-1912), 2698 (5-19-1914), 2848 (2-2-1915), and 2958 (6-29-1915).

[12]Ibid., Job Number 1760 (3-8-1910), 5116 (1-26-1923), and 5445 (12-20-1924).

[13]Ibid., Job Number 7024 (7-10-1936) and 7056 (12-7-1936) and the Detroit Free Press, August 2, 1936; November 15, 1936; and October 10, 1937.